

Albertus Otto Faber

the German Doctor (c.1612-1684)

AMONG the books mentioned in George Fox's library list¹ is one called *The Visions of Stephen Mellish*. The translator was a German doctor, Albertus Otto Faber. Of Faber's chequered career in England and his close association with Friends for a number of years there are scattered evidences in our records, while there are nearly thirty references to him in the *Calendar of State Papers Domestic* between 1663 and 1672. Joseph Smith's *Catalogue of Friends' Books* gives eleven works by him, most of them in English and published in London. Others are in Latin and several of his letters are in French. He was at one time "royal physician to the Swedish army",² and was a Protestant.³ It was a summons to the court of Charles II that brought him to England⁴ where he must have arrived soon after the Restoration. In London he began to enquire sympathetically into Quakerism. In a letter dated 1660, endorsed "Garmon docter to G.F."⁵ we learn that he and his wife Claude⁶ have already met Fox and that Claude Faber has been deeply affected, "by his speech to her at first, the sparks being blown were stirred up", although she did not understand English. For this reason he is anxious to find a house they can share with Gerrard Roberts, where they hope to meet the Friends who often gather there. They have already made repeated efforts to find George Fox at meetings in or near London but without success and his wife is in a deep melancholy until she can be satisfied. Evidently he has not long arrived for he says that he cannot "begin any thing" until he has a house. He already knows several Friends and mentions John Perrott and Nicholas Bond. The letter is carried by his maidservant. In a letter written the following year Isabel Hacker, the widow of Colonel Hacker the regicide, speaks of "the German doctor and his wife" coming into the room during a private meeting in progress at William Travers's house, in Watling Street, where George Fox, Richard Hubberthorne, Francis Howgill, George Whitehead, John Perrott, the writer herself and others were present and the opinions of John Perrott were

under searching criticism.⁷ The doctor's entry we are told interrupted the meeting and some of those present adjourned to an upper chamber to continue the discussion.

Faber translated two pamphlets of visions of Stephen Mellish, who is variously described in them as of Prague, Breslau, and Lissa (Prussia). They are written in a style that appears to imitate the *Book of Revelations* and the translator evidently believed it his duty to communicate them to the people of England. The first is the one that is found in George Fox's library.⁸ It was for sale at the doctor's own house in Addle Hill. The second⁹ was brought to the printer by a Friend, John Furly of Colchester, the brother of the learned Benjamin Furly of Amsterdam. The printer, "widow Dover" printed, unlicensed, a number of Friends' books and in an informer's report is described as "a common printer for all scandalous pamphlets".¹⁰ Continuing to associate with Friends, Faber now began to get into serious trouble. On 14th August, 1664 while at a meeting at the Bull and Mouth he, with about two hundred other men and women, was arrested by the Sheriff's officers under the Conventicle Act.¹¹ The doctor was accused of being a Jesuit on the information of Roger L'Estrange, recently appointed licenser of the press and a keen opponent of liberty of opinion, and was committed to prison for three months.

He protested to the Lord Mayor in a long letter in French,¹² arguing with some cogency his freedom as a foreigner from the expressed intentions of the Conventicle Act. This was followed up by a printed tract, *A Remonstrance in reference to the Act . . .*, in which he adds the argument that "if the Principle of the Quakers be of God then no power of men can overthrow them", if not "they must fall without all such bustling".

He was evidently regarded as a prisoner of some importance for in November when his three months' sentence expired his case was referred by the Lord Mayor first to the Lord Chancellor and then to the King himself, and he was ordered to leave the country within three days. He wrote to the King apologizing for criticizing the magistrates and appealed to be allowed to stay till Easter on account of the winter season.¹³ He remained in the country in pursuit of his calling, undisturbed for another two years.

Letters to him about this time show that he was accepted among Friends and also had business relations with several of them. John Laurence of Wrampingham (Norfolk) wrote to him, at about the time of his arrest, about sales of his medicines and also, as though to a Friend, about the persecution of Friends at the late Assizes.¹⁴ A little later Martin Mason of Lincoln corresponded with him in very friendly vein showing intimate acquaintance with both the doctor and his wife, discussing also business affairs and difficulties that have arisen over the supply of medicines to vendors on account of the doctor's troubles.¹⁵

While travelling in November 1666 he had the misfortune to be arrested at the Unicorn Inn, Banbury, on suspicion of complicity with a number of other men in a charge of arson. Though at Oxford Assizes the charge was dismissed, yet on account of his previous history Faber's case was referred to Whitehall and in spite of his appeals to Secretary Williamson, Lord Arlington and to the King himself he was deported from Dover to Flanders on 22nd August, 1667, by Order in Council.¹⁶

In his letter to the King he disclaimed any serious attachment to Quakerism, saying that his attendance at meetings was only by way of inquiry into their principles and offering evidence of attendance at the French Church in London. Thus apparently terminates the connection with Friends of one who, being of an open mind, religiously inclined and sensitive to spiritual experience, was not prepared to pay the price which steadfast adherence to a persecuted movement called for in the reign of Charles II.

Of his later history we know only that he asked of the King and received permission to return to England in 1672¹⁷ and that in 1677 he described himself as Physician in Ordinary to his Sacred and Royal Majesty.¹⁸

He died in 1684, aged 72, and there is a tablet to his memory in St. Dunstan's in the West, Fleet Street, exhibiting a coat of arms and extolling his piety and benevolence and his scientific, linguistic and literary abilities.¹⁹

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¹ Printed in *Jnl. F.H.S.*, xxviii., 4ff.

² *A Relation of Some Notable Cures* [1663?]. also his tomb.

³ *Cal. S.P.D.*, 1667, 63.

- 4 *Cal. S.P.D.*, 1667, 63.
- 5 Swarthmore MSS., Trans., IV, 111.
- 6 Martin Mason MSS., 66ff.
- 7 Crosse MSS., 100, Isabel Hacker to A.D., i.xi.1661-2.
- 8 *XII Visions of Stephen Mellish*, 1663. Vol. 25 of the Hawkins Collection. *Jnl. F.H.S.*, xxx., 14.
- 9 *England's Warning . . . Three Remarkable Visions . . .* 1664.
- 10 *Extracts from State Papers*, 229.
- 11 Besse : *Sufferings*, I, 394n.
- 12 *E.S.P.*, 215-17.
- 13 *E.S.P.*, 215. *Cal. S.P.D.*, 1664-5, 60.
- 14 *E.S.P.*, 214.
- 15 Martin Mason MSS., 66ff.
- 16 *Cal. S.P.D.*, 1666-7, 276 ; 1667, 5, 6, 25, 49, 63, 355, 409, 426.
- 17 *Cal. S.P.D.*, 1671-72, 364.
- 18 *De Auro Potabili Medicinali*, 1677, dedicated to Charles II.
- 19 M.S. in Guildhall Library, London.